

15
PROCEEDINGS

OF THE

FOURTH ANNIVERSARY MEETING

OF THE

WESTERN MEDICAL AND SURGICAL
SOCIETY OF LONDON,

APRIL 12, 1850:

WITH

The Address

DELIVERED ON THE OCCASION BY SIR B. C. BRODIE, BART. F.R.S.
PRESIDENT OF THE SOCIETY.

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WESTERN MEDICAL AND SURGICAL SOCIETY.

THIS Society celebrated its fourth anniversary this evening by a *conversazione*, in the large room in the Cadogan Gardens, Sloane Street, which was quite filled on the occasion by members and visitors. Among the latter we noticed Dr. Murphy, the President, and several of the leading members of the Westminster Medical Society.

The President, Sir Benjamin Brodie, having taken the chair at 8 o'clock precisely, the honorary Secretary proceeded to read the Report of the Council. The report commenced by congratulating the members on the continued prosperity of the Society, and informed them of the donations which had been made to the library during the past year, by means of which, and by purchase, upwards of 140 volumes had been added, independently of plates, pamphlets, and monographs. It was mentioned as a most gratifying circumstance, that the library had been more extensively consulted than during any preceding year; and it was announced that a printed catalogue would soon be issued. The reading-room was stated to have been well supplied with journals, and to have been maintained in great efficiency and comfort. The report having next noticed the valuable communications which had been made at the meetings—the useful and practical discussions which had ensued—and the kindly spirit by which these had invariably been characterized, went on to allude to the steps which had just been taken to extend to medical students and assistants whatever advantage the Society could afford, by admitting them, under the title of associates, to all the privileges enjoyed by members, except participation in the management of the society's affairs. The Council referred in highly eulogistic terms to the important services rendered the Society by Sir James Clark, in acknowledgment of which, as well as for the sake of expressing the high sense entertained of his distinguished attainments as

a physician, and his strenuous efforts on all occasions to uphold the dignity and elevate the character of the profession, he had been elected during the past year its first honorary member. The report concluded by an emphatic statement on the part of the Council, founded on the experience of four years, that the Society had been useful beyond their expectation—not only by conferring the benefits to which allusion had already been made, but in bringing together and uniting in cordial co-operation individuals previously unacquainted with each other, and thus correcting prejudices and removing unfounded jealousies. With this conviction the Council felt justified in making an earnest appeal to their medical brethren dwelling in the neighbourhood, who had not yet joined the Society, to come forward and participate in all the benefits it was calculated to confer,—and they expressed their hope that eventually every resident practitioner would be enrolled among its members. If in a great suburban district like this such an union of the profession for medical and scientific objects could be effected, we might anticipate that similar institutions would be established in other districts of the metropolis, and that all acting in concert with each other, and with our great central societies, would exhibit the medical profession to the world in its proper character, of one united body zealously striving to advance its knowledge, that it might faithfully fulfil the high and important duties committed to its charge. This report was adopted by acclamation, as was also the report of the auditors, which represented the affairs of the Society to be in a favourable condition, there being a balance of nearly fifteen pounds in hand after all demands were satisfied.

A resolution was then carried unanimously, conveying the thanks of the Society to the President and officers for their services during the past year.

Sir Benjamin Brodie (who was received with great applause) returned thanks ; and having first alluded to the state of the Society, as set forth in the report, proceeded as follows :—

When I last had the honour of addressing you, I pointed out what I conceived to be the principal advantage of an institution of this kind. Among the foremost of these I mentioned the maintenance of friendly and generous feelings among those who are engaged in the same useful and honourable pursuits, tending to supersede those feelings of distrust and jealousy and petty rivalry, which are unworthy of a liberal and scientific profession ; but which (such is the weakness of human nature) are too apt to exist in every class of society, the members of which are not brought into personal communication with each other. For this reason, and setting aside all other circumstances, I am convinced that a society such as ours must tend, in no small degree, to the comfort and happiness of the individuals of whom it is composed. As there is nothing more painful to a well-constituted mind than to be at variance with, suspicious, or distrustful of others, so is there nothing which tends more to elevate the moral character, or to inspire us with peaceful and contented feelings, than the consciousness that our competitors are our friends, with whom we are on such a footing that we mutually make allowance for each other's feelings, and are on all occasions ready to do justice to each other's good qualities, whether of the head or heart.

What I have just now mentioned is a mere matter of fact, and I am sure that there is no one among us who has been for many years engaged in medical practice who will not at once assent to the truth of these observations. It will be well for those who are just entering on the active duties of life, and of whom it may be presumed that they have many years of busy occupation before them, to avail themselves in this particular of the experience of older persons, and shape their course accordingly ; and I venture to say that the doing so will save them from many heart-burnings, many sleepless nights, many anxieties which they would have to endure otherwise. In human nature there is much weakness,—there are many faults and failings,—but mixed up with what we would wish to be otherwise, there is much that is good, that is kind, and noble, and after a long experience of the world I have come to the conclusion that the true way of dealing with mankind is, as a general rule, to trust to their good qualities rather than to the controlling of their bad ones. If you would make a man a gentleman, you must treat him as a gentleman. We are all and every one of us

liable to be mistaken as to the motives by which others are influenced, especially in matters which are supposed to concern our individual interests. To suspect another of being influenced by unworthy motives, is to degrade him in his own estimation ; and there is nothing which a proud and independent spirit will find it so difficult to forgive ; as, on the other hand, there are few persons who will not feel some sort of gratitude for having the most favourable construction put on their conduct, even when their conscience tells them that it is more than they really merit.

Gentlemen, we are all of us, whatever may be the department of the profession to which we belong, engaged in an arduous undertaking. The lives of individuals, the happiness of families, are entrusted to our care. The medical practitioner can never be off his guard. He never can say, “To-day I have nothing of consequence to attend to.” The next hour (be it day or night) may place him in a situation in which the life of another person and his own reputation are concerned ; and in which, in order that he may preserve the former, and establish or maintain the latter, all his knowledge, and skill, and prudence, and presence of mind, must be summoned to his aid.

It would be needless for me to dilate on the responsibilities, the labour, the anxieties belonging to medical and surgical practice, of which even the youngest man among us must be fully sensible. The public generally have but an imperfect notion of the amount of moral restraint and intellectual effort necessary for the right performance of our duties. We, on the other hand, viewing these things more closely, are, perhaps, too apt to believe that there is no profession of which so much is required as is required of ours. Let us, however, look as closely at other pursuits in life, and I much doubt whether they will gain by the comparison. They have all their respective advantages and disadvantages, and the latter more especially are liable to be overlooked by those who view them from a distance. The solicitor will tell you that questions which relate to the preservation of property are even more perplexing, more harassing, than those which relate to the preservation of life : that the anxieties to which he is liable, instead of being brought to a termination in a few days or weeks, may be prolonged for months or years : that a mere technical error, long overlooked, may rise up in judgment against him who makes it, after a very long interval of time.

But it may be said that it is otherwise with the higher department of the Law ; and this, indeed, is in great measure true : but the barrister has his causes for anxiety also, though of another kind. How many are those members of the bar who sit in

Westminster Hall year after year, and go circuit after circuit, and yet scarcely obtain a sufficient number of briefs to pay the expenses of their travelling and their chambers! Then, if a barrister succeeds in obtaining an extensive practice, the tenure by which he holds it is proverbially uncertain. Some new candidate may present himself, who is more popular with solicitors, who, perhaps, with less real knowledge of law, has a greater tact in managing a jury, and may *push him from his stool*.

Then, is the profession of the Church to be preferred, as a profession, to our own? There are, it is true, many with ample benefices, who lead a life of comparative ease; and many on whom these advantages are properly bestowed: but how many are there also, pious and devoted persons, living on the smallest stipend, passing through life without the means of putting out their children decently in the world; and subject to this especial mortification, that, except under some peculiar circumstances, they can do little by their own exertions for themselves, and must owe their advancement to the favour and caprice of others, and not to their own merits.

Then, have those engaged in Mercantile Speculations, or any branch of trade, no causes of anxiety? How many do we see apparently prosperous and wealthy, all at once cast down from their high estate, and brought to ruin through their own want of caution; or, it may be, without any fault of their own, through the imprudence and dishonesty of others! With them, even in the midst of success, there may be cause for apprehension. I was desired to visit one of the family of an extensive merchant in the neighbourhood of London. He lived in a magnificent house, with every sign of luxury about him. His medical attendant, whom I met on the occasion, observed—"Mr. — himself is ill; but I know the reason of it, he is always so when he expects the arrival of his China ships."

"Cætera de genere hóc, adeo sunt multa loquacem
Delassare valent Fabium."

Such was the remark of a great moralist when discussing a somewhat similar question; and it would be easy for me to extend these observations, though it would be a needless waste of time to do so.

Every profession has its advantages and disadvantages. I have referred to the labour, anxieties, and responsibilities of that to which we ourselves belong; but it is well for us to look to the other side of the account. It is not a blank page; and I am much inclined to believe that whoever views the matter with a candid and impar-

tial spirit will find that there is a considerable balance on the favourable side.

I know that it may be said that having been during my whole professional life engaged in one particular line of practice, I cannot be a fair judge of what the profession may be in its other departments. I do not, however, admit the justice of this conclusion. I have friends in all parts of the profession; I know the nature of their occupations, and have watched their progress for many successive years. Then I am confident that there is no situation more trying to him who holds it than that of the young hospital surgeon, exposed (as he very properly is) to the remarks and criticisms of the public, nor any in which there is less repose for the mind, or greater reason to feel anxiety as to the future, than that of an individual whose practice is confined to surgery.

Let us look first at the influence which the medical profession has, or ought to have, on the minds of those who devote themselves to it. Their immediate object is always to do good to others: they are engaged in the pursuit, not of a trade, but of an important science, which concerns the highest interests of mankind in their present state of existence. The medical practitioner must, for his own sake, always aim at the attainment of truth, and endeavour to observe, to think, and reason correctly. All this is good for his moral and intellectual character; and the result is, that with all our errors, and all the imperfections which belong to us, there is perhaps no class in society, on the whole, more liberal, more free from prejudice, and more disposed to render disinterested service to others, than the great body of the medical profession. Then there is no other profession in which the individuals belonging to it have to depend so entirely on their own character and conduct. Whatever advantages you may obtain in life, you earn them for yourselves: you acquire the good opinion of the public of all classes, but you neither owe, nor can owe, any obligations to the favour of the great. Others may be kindly disposed towards you, but your most zealous friends—your nearest relatives—will not entrust their lives and the lives of their families to your care unless they believe that it is their interest to do so: and hence it is that the medical practitioner who has laboured to obtain an adequate knowledge of his art, and who honestly and diligently performs his duties, has a right to consider himself as one of the most independent members of society.

I must here confess that it seems to me that this sense of independence is not sufficiently impressed on the minds of a large proportion of our profession. You may be

assured that there is no one who thinks it worth his while to place himself under your care, to whom you are not really of more importance than he can be to you : what you can give to him is more than anything that he bestows on you in return. But, if you would have others do you justice, you must first do justice to yourselves ; and how is that to be accomplished ? It is by shaping your conduct with a view to the general result, and obtaining the good opinion of society at large, of persons of all classes, high and low, rich and poor, without reference to what may be said or done in particular cases or by particular individuals. We have to deal with the wise and the foolish, with those who know how much, or how little, they may justly expect from our assistance, and with many the victims of luxury, idleness, and an imperfect moral education, who not only expect too much, but who think that they have a sort of right to expect an exemption from the evils of life, such as it does not belong to human nature to attain. Among the last-mentioned persons we cannot fail to meet with perverseness and caprice ; or to find that, when we have done that which it is possible, we are blamed because we have not done that which it is impossible for us to perform. But all this need be no more than a temporary annoyance to the upright and diligent practitioner, who is conscious that he has laboured to attain an adequate knowledge of his art, and that on all occasions he endeavours to do his best. Such persons as I have described may display their caprice by changing their medical attendant, by resorting to one quack after another, and, as far as we are concerned, it is really much more desirable that they should do so, than that they should remain under the care of any one of us, when they think that they can do something better for themselves.

Let me not, however, be misunderstood as making these observations in any spirit of unkindness or hostility to those to whom they relate. If we claim, as claim we must, that allowance should be made by others for our own failings and imperfections, much more are we called upon to make allowance for the failings and imperfections of those who labour under the afflictions of bodily disease. We have to a great extent the power of relieving pain and preserving life, but our power is limited ; on the other hand, there is no limit to the desire of obtaining relief, and the anxiety to live may still linger in those who are on the point of death. Under these circumstances it seems almost a matter of course that those to whom we can render no further aid, and whose minds are probably weakened by previous

illness, should be easily induced to seek for aid elsewhere, and be ready to listen to any promises of men, however vain and absurd, or even dishonest, those promises may be. Taking all things into consideration, it appears to me to be a question whether there is not, on the whole, more cause for wonder in the patience of the many than in the impatience of the few ; and whether the gratitude of those who over-estimate our services does not even more than compensate for the neglect of those who withhold from us the credit which we really deserve.

In enumerating what I believe to be the advantages belonging to the profession of which we are members, there is one other point which I ought not to overlook. However much assistance we may in early life derive from attendance on lectures, and afterwards from the study of books, the knowledge which we thus obtain, necessary as it is, is nevertheless only of a preliminary kind, and is nothing at all in comparison with that which each individual derives from his own personal experience. The consequence is, that every succeeding year the medical practitioner becomes more equal to his duties than he was before ; and, except it be in the case of those whom an over-weening self-confidence renders careless and indifferent, this improvement continues as long as we retain the integrity of our faculties unimpaired by disease or age : hence it is, that medical practice is not liable to the fluctuations of which those engaged in some other professions have too much reason to complain. In his own circle, the place of the experienced and judicious medical practitioner is not easily supplied. This his patients feel, and this he must feel himself. The principal source of anxiety to a professional man in the beginning of his career is the doubt whether he will maintain whatever reputation he has been able to acquire. If any one case turns out less fortunately than he had reason to expect, he dreads (and much more than he need to do) the influence which it may have on his future fortunes. But this source of anxiety gradually diminishes as years increase, and at last he discovers that he may safely rely on his general character, which is independent of the successful or unsuccessful termination of a particular case.

But, after all, the value of the profession to each individual engaged in it depends more on the individual himself than on any extraneous circumstance. It is an indifferent and irksome trade ; but it is a noble and interesting science. If you would pursue it with credit and comfort, you must regard it as the latter, and not as the former. And this explains one great advantage of a Society such as that which I

now address,—which brings us together as men of science, not as the proprietors of a railway or canal, to discuss the value of shares and the amount of dividends, but to compare our experience, to increase our knowledge, and thus to have our minds elevated above the meaner pursuits of life.

This address was listened to throughout with the deepest attention, and the applause at the close was loud and long-continued.

The following gentlemen were then elected to fill the various offices during the ensuing year :—

President.—Dr. Robert Lec, F.R.S.

Vice-Presidents.—Dr. Aldis, Mr. Barnes, Mr. Gaskell, Mr. Godrich.

Treasurer.—Dr. Woolley.

Council.—Dr. Barclay, Mr. Bullock, Dr. Christian, Mr. Douglas, Mr. Haden, Mr. Ince, Mr. Martyn, Mr. Muller, Mr. Phillips, Dr. Simpson, Dr. Traquair, Mr. Whitmore.

Secretary.—Mr. Seaton.

Auditors.—Mr. Keen and Mr. Webb.

The formal business being concluded,

Dr. MANTELL, at the request of Sir Benjamin Brodie, then favoured the meeting with an address on the osteology and physiology of the colossal reptiles from the south-east of England, of which there were some unique and most interesting specimens on the table, from his own collection, and of the gigantic extinct struthious birds of New Zealand, collected by his son, Mr. Walter Mantell. The Iguanodon, of which the lower jaw was exhibited, Dr. Mantell described as the most extraordinary example of the mammalian modifications of structure, grafted, as it were, on the saurian type. With a lower jaw of the true reptilian character, composed of six bones on each side, with a constant succession of teeth, and possessing a symphysis analogous to that of the larger herbivorous Edentata; a pectoral arch, also truly saurian, consisting of a largely-developed coracoid and scapula, sternum and clavicle; and a spinal column, in which the neurapophyses are united by suture to the body of the vertebræ; were associated an arrangement of the teeth as in the ruminantia; femora and humeri with well-developed articulations and trochanters, and large medullary canals; and tarsals, metatarsals, and phalangeals, resembling those of the hippopotamus. Dr. Mantell then dwelt at some length on the structure of the lower jaw of the iguanodon on the table, which must have been nearly four feet long when entire. He showed how beautifully the great development of the muscles and soft parts that originally covered the jaw (as demonstrated by the

number and large size of the foramina communicating with the great dental canal, and distributed externally along the ramus down to the symphysis) corroborated the inferences deducible from the mammalia-like teeth, and the projecting edentulous anterior part of the lower jaw, which closely resembled that of the *Myiodon*.

The teeth (which the illustrious Cuvier had at first regarded as the incisors of the rhinoceros) unquestionably indicated that the original must have performed the mastication of vegetable substances, like the herbivorous mammalia; but, as no one living reptile has cheeks or fleshy lips, it was difficult to conceive how food could have been retained during mastication. In the jaw before us we found that marvellous adaptation of means to ends ever present in the works of the Creator. By a simple modification, the composite lower jaw of a reptile was made an efficient grinding instrument, and provided with muscles for the required movements, cheeks for the retention of food, a prehensile tongue, and a pendulous under lip, to seize and pluck the foliage and young stems of the arborescent ferns, palms, &c., with which the fossil remains were found associated. Dr. Mantell particularly solicited the attention of the physiologists present, to the statements he advanced as proving the correctness of his Memoir on the Maxillary and Dental Organs of the Iguanodon, published in the Philosophical Transactions, and for which the royal gold medal of 1849 was awarded him.

Dr. Mantell then gave an animated account of the circumstances under which the bones of stupendous extinct birds occurred in New Zealand, and briefly noticed the splendid collections made by his eldest son. After a perspicuous sketch of the most remarkable peculiarities of the osteology of the Moa or Dinornis, Dr. Mantell described the structure of the legs and feet of the ostrich, emu, and cassowary, as illustrative of those of the moa, as shown by the pair of feet on the table belonging to the same individual bird, dug up by Mr. W. Mantell in a turbary deposit, in the Middle Island. Every bone, including the two tarso-metatarsals, was numbered seriatim on the spot as dug up; and, being in an admirable state of preservation, had been articulated by Mr. Flower, under Dr. Mantell's direction, and thus for the first time was presented the normal structure of the feet of this gigantic and robust species of the moa. The characters of the feet, as compared with those of the recent species of struthionidæ, resemble those of the living Apteryx of New Zealand, the metatarsals being enormously strong, and the phalanges relatively larger, and more arched, than in

the ostrich, cassowary, &c., being evidently designed as powerful instruments for scratching or digging up roots, or other subterranean vegetable substances. Dr. Mantell, in conclusion, briefly considered that most interesting and mysterious physiological problem, the appearance and extinction of species and genera. He took a rapid and lucid view of the facts which support, if they be not regarded as sufficient to establish, the opinion of some eminent philosophers, that, as the duration of the life of every individual of a species is immutably restricted within very narrow limits, in like manner the existence of a genus or race on the surface of the earth, is doomed to terminate within a certain definite period. Some races may flourish only a few centuries; some may exist for thousands of years; but their final extinction is irrevocably determined by the laws of their organisation.

The bearing of this problem on many important physiological phenomena,—as the supposed origin of epidemics from the sudden developement of peculiar types of invisible animalcules, &c., was discussed in a candid and philosophical spirit, which was earnestly applauded by the meeting. In conclusion, Dr. Mantell begged to apologise for the discursive nature of his discourse, and in reference to his observations on the past condition of the earth and its inhabitants, as deducible from the remains of the successive races of animals and plants which had flourished for a while, become extinct, and been succeeded by other types, he only offered them as speculations, to be modified or abandoned

with the advance of science; for our knowledge and our judgments are in general only founded on probabilities, more or less great, which it is very important, but very difficult, to appreciate at their just value.

Mr. TOYNBEE was then kind enough, at the President's request, to give a short statement of his researches into the normal structure and various diseased conditions of the membrana tympani, and to exhibit a most beautiful series of preparations in illustration of them.

The members and visitors afterwards proceeded to examine the various objects of interest and curiosity scattered about the room. Among these were some rare books and valuable plates, lent by Sir James Clark, Dr. Pettigrew, &c. &c., and particularly some beautiful plates published by Dr. Piragoff, under the direction of the Russian Government, showing the condition of the intestinal canal after death by cholera; and some plates of a species of elephantiasis peculiar to Norway, issued by the Norwegian Government. Both these series were furnished by Mr. Haden. There was also a variety of curious instruments. But nothing in the room excited more attention than the original sketch of John Hunter, by Sir Joshua Reynolds, from which he afterwards painted the celebrated picture now in possession of the College of Surgeons. This sketch was given by John Hunter's widow to the uncle of Mr. Knight, of West Brompton, who kindly lent it to the Society for the occasion.
